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*File 010*

4 January 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Conversation with Secretary Laird

TIME AND PLACE: Monday, 4 January 1971, Secretary Laird's Office

PERSONS PRESENT: Secretary Laird, Deputy Secretary Packard,  
General Pursley and Mr. Carver

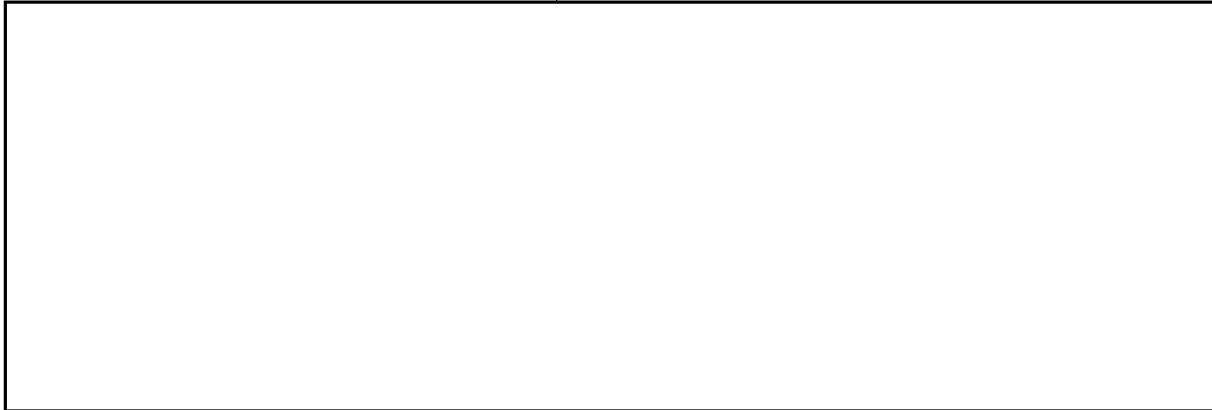
1. The primary business at this session was that of going over matters relevant to the trip on which Secretary Laird is leaving on 5 January. General Pursley had asked last week that we prepare brief talking notes on matters Secretary Laird should look into while travelling.

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3.  We discussed the current situation and the virtual certainty that the Cambodians would suffer at least some tactical adversity in the months ahead. We also agreed that, with luck, it should be possible to keep the North Vietnamese from scoring major military gains in Cambodia during the coming dry season provided the South Vietnamese rendered ground support where necessary, the US provided adequate air support, and the Cambodians were able to sustain their morale in the face of occasional setbacks. We also agreed that there was relatively little likelihood of a major Communist military push in South Vietnam under present circumstances, and with present levels of infiltration, even though the latter were up. The Secretary showed me a private message to him from Admiral McCain discussing the increased infiltration but pointing out that so far it was probably designed to offset the casualties suffered over the preceding year and not indicative of an imminent major offensive.

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4. We had a fairly lengthy and frank discussion of the South Vietnamese political situation, on which the Secretary was also given a short, summary paragraph. I explained that the latter was designed more as a memory cue than a detailed analysis. Secretary Laird, Mr. Packard and I were all in accord that the extent and nature of US involvement in South Vietnamese politics during 1971 was something that required serious consideration and conscious decision at the Presidential level. We also agreed that it would be a mistake to let Washington's hand be forced by events in Vietnam or by an activist posture on the part of the US Mission there. Although it was probably the case that US interests would be best served by Thieu's honestly winning a new term in a reasonably fair electoral contest and although the odds would currently appear to favor his chances of doing so,



Secretary Laird told me in confidence that he was quite concerned about this problem and thanked me for raising it. He also said he

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planned to talk to the Ambassador privately to see just how far Bunker was intending to go and what Bunker thought his instructions were or how much latitude he had in interpreting them. After getting a feel for the local situation and Bunker's attitudes related thereto Secretary Laird planned to take this matter up privately with the President upon his return.

5. I passed Secretary Laird the NPIC review of photography on North Vietnamese prisoner of war camps and pointed out our continuing requirements in this field if we were to provide the service he had asked us to render.

6. Secretary Laird thanked me for the Agency's support in matters relating to his trip. It was agreed that Deputy Secretary Packard and I would continue these sessions during Mr. Laird's absence. It was also agreed that during the weeks and months ahead we would keep under continuing review the possibility or advisability of additional disciplinary moves or gestures the US might profitably take to get the Paris negotiations off dead center. Mr. Packard raised the question of considering "carrots" for Hanoi but after some discussion we agreed that now was not the time to make such overtures. At the moment, the most effective pressure to be exerted on the North Vietnamese Politburo would be actions that could convince them the US

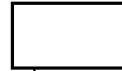
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Government's hands were not tied by or likely to be forced by public opinion or domestic anti-war sentiments. The offering of inducements in the near future would work against this objective.



George A. Carver, Jr.  
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

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